



Skamania County Public Transit Feasibility Study

June 2003

Submitted To

Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council
Skamania County Transportation Policy Committee

Submitted by

Landsman Transportation Planning, LLC



TransWatch
David Raphael
Bonnie Miller



SKAMANIA COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSIT FEASIBILITY STUDY

PROPOSAL

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview.....	3
Public Involvement.....	8
Chapter 2: Existing Conditions.....	9
Results of Telephone Survey.....	9
Stakeholder Interviews/Focus Groups.....	17
Service Providers.....	18
Pupil Transportation.....	29
Chapter 3: Needs Assessment and Strategies.....	40
Unmet Needs.....	41
Service Strategies.....	42
Organizational Structure.....	49
Funding Opportunities.....	50
Proposed Action Plan.....	51
Appendix: Fact Sheets	
Telephone Survey Questionnaire	
School Pool Information	

Figures

1: Survey Respondents by Age.....	10
2: Place of Residence.....	11
3: Most Frequently Travel.....	12
4: Trip Purpose.....	13
5: Difficulty Getting Places.....	14

6: Destinations Transit Should Serve.....	15
7: Support for Service.....	16
8: Support for Transit Sales Tax.....	17
9: Potential Service Options.....	43
10: Pros and Cons of Zone/Flex Routing.....	45
11: Recommended Plan of Action.....	51

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

With over 1,600 square miles within its boundaries, rural Skamania County, Washington is home to about 10,000 residents, Gifford, Pinchot National Forest, Mount St. Helens, the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center and some of the most beautiful scenery in the country. Most of the residents live in the southern-most part of the county near the Columbia River, and within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. This area is served by State Highway 14 that runs east west and provides access to I-5 and Vancouver, Portland and Seattle. Only four employers in the county employ more than 100 workers. These are Skamania Lodge (300 workers), Skamania County (225), Stevenson-Carson School District (154) and Williams Kaise and Olsen Lumber (125). Therefore a large percentage of residents-52 percent according to the 2000 census, an increase of 12 percentage points since 1990-commute to other counties including Clark County WA (21 percent), Multnomah County OR (13 percent), Hood River County OR (8 percent) and Klickitat County WA (5 percent). In fact residents must travel out of county to get new glasses, go to the doctor or have a prescription filled. For those people who cannot or do not drive or have a car, getting where they need or want to go can be a problem.

As in many rural counties a variety of groups provides transportation services. Skamania Senior Services provides demand-response services for the elderly and disabled, the general population and for Medicaid trips. With a budget of about \$750,000 a year and a fleet of nine vans, three mini-vans and two small buses, this service provides about 2,000 trips a month. Several years ago Senior Services received a rural mobility grant to provide commuter services for work trips. This program was not successful because serving the diverse origins and destinations of commuters interfered too much with service for seniors.

The four school districts in Skamania County provide pupil transportation for their students, but do not currently provide any after school transportation although Stevenson/Carson will begin transporting students to and from a new after school program for middle school youngsters in the fall of 2003.

With a grant from WSDOT and ODOT Greyhound provided intercity bus service from Yakima to Portland stopping in Stevenson for the past several years. This service provides one round-trip a day arriving in Stevenson from Portland to Yakima at 3:50 PM and arriving at 10:20 AM on the return trip to Portland. This schedule does not allow a one-day round trip to Yakima. It would be possible to make a rushed trip to Portland in one-day, but it would be difficult. This service will be terminated in June 2003.

While there are some other non-profit and social service-related transportation services, there are no other transit providers that serve the general population. In fact when Medicaid looks for service providers to provide back up to Senior Services, they have to pay a medical transportation provider to come to Skamania County from somewhere else.

Skamania elected officials believe there is a growing need for a formal public transportation system in Skamania County. They cite three major reasons for this:

- A large number of workers must travel out of county to find work and therefore have long and expensive commutes to work. A well-running car is essential for employment in a majority of cases
- Increases in elderly and disabled population who must rely on others for transportation. While Senior Services provides this service, it needs more financial support to meet the future demand
- With parents working, many children have no way to get to after school activities, especially in Mill A, Mount Pleasant and Skamania School Districts where they do not provide transportation for extracurricular activities.

In response to these concerns, the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC) and the Skamania County Transportation Policy Committee conducted a Public Transit Feasibility Study to determine the need and feasibility of the development of a formal transit system in Skamania County, Washington.

To determine unmet needs and develop strategies to meet those needs this plan conducted:

- A telephone survey of 300 residents of Skamania County.
- Stakeholder interviews with employers, advocates and local organizations.
- One focus group each with senior citizens and caseworkers.
- An inventory of all providers in the county and adjacent to it.
- An inventory of school transportation providers.
- An extensive public involvement program.

Findings from these sources include:

- Between 5 and 10 percent of the people in Skamania County have missed important life activities because of a lack of transportation
- Those under 65 are more likely to have transportation problems than those 65 and older. They are 60 percent more likely to miss trips for personal business than are those 65 and older
- Many people rely on an informal network of transportation either providing or getting rides from friends and relatives.
- Most people in the county know about Senior Services Transportation; about one quarter of the households have a member who has used the service. You are much more likely to use the service if you live in the Stevenson/Carson area
- Almost 75 percent of the community believe Skamania County needs more public transportation services; they think the two most important services to provide are more dial-a-ride for the transportation disadvantaged including the elderly and disabled and after school services for children. Seniors think intercity service to Hood River is the second most important need.
- Almost 75 percent of people say they support a 3/10th of one percent sales tax to pay for services for the transportation disadvantaged. Over 60 percent say they support such a tax for general public service. This number often overestimates the percent of people who will actually vote for a tax increase.
- Senior Services does an excellent job. This service provides rides for medical some social service trips, and monthly shopping trips to Hood River and Vancouver. It will transport others if rides are available.

- Lack of other transportation services is a quality of life issue for many people who cannot pursue activities that they want or need to.
- People living outside of Stevenson\Carson are less likely to avail themselves of SS or have access to programs in Stevenson.

Based on an analysis of these findings coupled with a survey of providers, this plan determined Skamania County has the following unmet transportation needs.

- **Daily connections into the greater Portland area.** This service should meet the needs of those who are commuting to work or school. This can be accomplished by connecting with C-Tran perhaps at the Fisher's Landing Transit Center. Perhaps another way to meet this need for some people is to establish **vanpool service** that can take people into Clark County either to connect them with C-Tran or their specific job site.
- **More connections into Hood River.** Many people need to go to Hood River to shop or pick up medical supplies or prescriptions. People over 65 select this as their most important destination. Since it is not a commuter service it does not have to be daily or be scheduled to get people to work. This could be accomplished through coordination with both Mount Adams service in White Salmon and CAT service in Cascade Locks. Skamania County should work with these two other counties to see if there are opportunities not just for connections but also to seek funding.
- **More in-county demand response** service especially in the afternoon to help students get home after school activities and to give seniors more flexibility in traveling. Another approach to meeting student needs is a carpool program called **School Pool**. School pools are targeted school carpooling programs for parents and youth. The program can be set up using a simple ride matching technique of mapping addresses with pins and a map or a more sophisticated system of using a city's, county's or transit district's rideshare matching program. Parents fill out a match list request form and send it to the designated coordinating school or agency. Confidentiality concerns are addressed by limiting information distributed to other participating families. Compiled information, called match lists, is sent to other participating parents of the designated school. Match lists are only available to parents registered in the school pool program. This program can also be expanded to be a school vanpool in which parents drive a van that they are allowed to use on weekends. Another option for students worth exploring is coordination of school district transportation to see if it is possible to free up any routes that could be used for after school activities transportation.

In the early stages of this study, the county submitted a grant request to WSDOT for funding for additional transit services to meet the needs of the county. The grant application did not specify those services because the study has just begun. However, with the completion of the study and the award of those funds, this study recommends that the county implement a zone routing service that connects Skamania County with both Clark County and the White Salmon connection to Hood River. A zone routing

system follows a time and direction schedule, traveling through set areas at set times. Within each zone it provides demand response service, responding to calls for pick up at specific locations. This service can meet the needs of commuters, shoppers, and people who are traveling within the county. It provides curb-to-curb service for those who need it.

The following table presents this service option plus a range of others to meet the various unmet transit needs within the county.

Service Strategies

Service/description	Serves	Costs/Resources	Tools
Zone route: travel from Stevenson to Clark County to connect with C-Tran and to White Salmon to connect with MATS going into Hood River. Its deviated route would have several set time points but would pick people at requested location. Other than at set time points riders would need to call in advance to request pick up	Would serve commuters, travelers going to Vancouver or Portland and Hood River as well as those traveling within the county including after school students and seniors	For completely new service, would cost about \$110,000 a year to provide this service. Could be provided as a modification of existing dial-a-ride service. Also would need mini-bus and backup vehicle costing about \$75,000, could purchase through long term lease	Senior Services; WDOT grant; Jobs access funding.
Volunteer Program: recruit and train a network of volunteer drivers to support local and inter-county transportation services. This will expand dial-a-ride options	Medical appointments, shopping, occasional trips. Youngsters participating in county recreation programs.	Quarter time person to manage and market program; mileage reimbursement Yearly cost: \$15,000	Website, interagency coordination
Community Vanpool Service: a central sponsoring agency providing insured, maintained and accessible vehicles to local town councils or community associations in exchange for their	Group trips or other needs identified by community.	Vehicles, gas, insurance, sponsoring agency and volunteer drivers, Yearly cost depends on number of miles traveled. Less than \$5,000	United Way, private foundations, corporate sponsorship

agreement to operate the vehicles, pay for gas and oil, and recruit and supervise volunteer drivers.			
Ridesharing: Program to assist commuters find partners to share rides to Clark County and other locations	Commuters	Website management and set up; marketing of program to get critical mass of users. Quarter-time person to market: Yearly cost \$10,000; could also support vanpool program	CarpoolMatchNW; Website and RTC support
Vanpool: Riders going to a closely located work sites in Clark County or other locations could share a vanpool. Requires 30 day payment in advance and long-term commitment	Commuters going to Clark County/Portland area on a daily basis for the work day	Sponsoring agency/person to lease the vehicle. Riders pay cost of vehicle	C-Tran will pay 25% of cost for service into Clark County; Website
School pool: School pools are targeted school carpooling programs for parents and youth.	Students staying after school or attending other after school activity	Need school admin time to distribute, collect and organize; No yearly cost	Website; coordination with schools
Intercity Service: This service could connect from The Dalles to Hood River While Salmon, Stevenson into the Greater Portland area. It would run once or twice a day at times that are convenient for users to go into the Greater Portland area and return in the same day	All travelers although it might not be convenient for commuters. People could access airport and Amtrak	Assuming two round trips a day at 3 hours one way, 12 hours of service at \$35 an hour five days a week would cost about \$110,000 a year. This does not take into account cost of crossing bridge. Would need coordination between Oregon and Washington	Gorge coordinating committee.

Public Involvement

To foster a strong coalition of support, the Skamania County Public Transit Feasibility Study provided a knowledge-driven public involvement process. Outreach centered on educating the public about the study's purpose, key mobility issues for Skamania County, options other communities have employed, and alternative transit scenarios for Skamania County to explore.

Development of a universal list of stakeholders by the study's Steering Committee provided the study's staff with the foundation for varied and innovative outreach.

Methods used to reach the widest audience included:

- Distribution of three fact sheets (the third fact sheet scheduled for distribution in June, 2003) to educate the public about the study, data findings, and study conclusions. See appendix. All Skamania County registered voters received the initial fact sheet through the mail. Subsequent distribution occurred with assistance by SCPTFS Steering Committee, placement at key public locations throughout the County and via stakeholder groups.
- Development of the Skamania County Public Transit Feasibility Study website: ***www.rtc.wa.gov/studies/skamania*** with on-line feedback option, posting of technical memorandums, and public involvement events.
- Posting of fact sheets and public involvement events on cable access TV.
- Comment line through Senior Services.
- Media outreach to local (Camas Post, The Columbian, Skamania Pioneer, The Enterprise) and regional (The Oregonian) print organizations and local radio (KIHR A.M.) stations.
- Newsletter articles placed in local, regional, and statewide newspapers such as the N. Bonneville Community Newsletter and statewide, such as the WSDOT's Grass Routes.
- Coordination of the *Community Forums on Transportation Choices* well attended by the public to learn what transportation options other communities have employed to meet their mobility needs.
- Coordination of SCPTFS Open House on study findings and alternative scenarios. Notice of event advertised in local and regional media, mailed to all website participants, focus group participants, transportation providers, school district representative, and other groups, individuals, and organizations on the universal stakeholder list.

Chapter 2: Existing Conditions

This chapter describes existing services, the results of a telephone survey and stakeholder interviews. It also identifies opportunities for coordination among the existing services.

Results of Telephone Survey

This document presents the findings of a telephone survey conducted as part of the Skamania County Public Transportation Feasibility Study (SCPTFS) during the week of September 23. This survey asks questions about travel patterns, difficulty taking trips, awareness and use of existing service and support for future public transportation services. The results of this survey will help inform the development of a plan for future transportation services in Skamania County.

A professional market research firm, Market Decisions, developed the survey sample and conducted the survey to ensure that results were reliable. Telephone surveyors asked screening questions to attain diversity in age, gender and geographic distribution. The actual questionnaire, developed by the study team, is in the appendix.

Major findings of this survey of 295 individuals are:

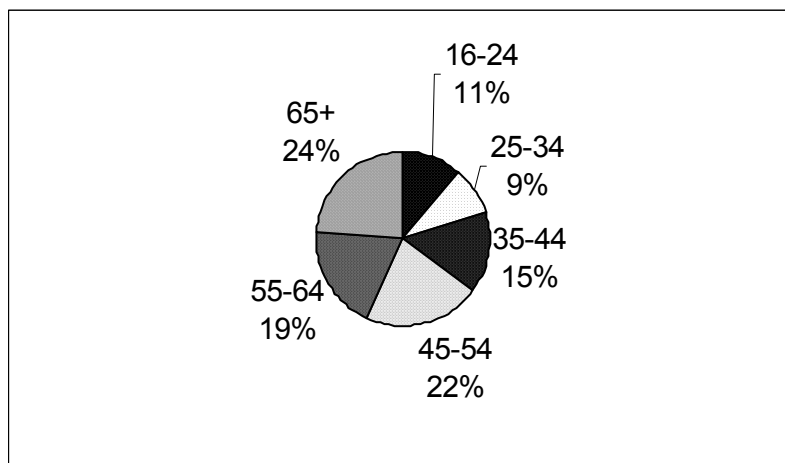
- The most frequent destination for current travel is Hood River followed by Portland and Vancouver. People who live in the western part of the county are, however, more likely to travel to Vancouver than Hood River or Portland.
- Senior citizens have different travel patterns with a significant number traveling to Hood River followed by Stevenson.
- While usually the most common purpose for making trips is work, shopping was the most common reason in this survey.
- Between 5 and 10 percent of the people in Skamania County have missed important life activities because of a lack of transportation.
- The most frequent type of trip that people miss is for social or personal business purposes.
- Those under 65 are more likely to have transportation problems than those 65 and older. They are 60 percent more likely to miss trips for personal business than are those 65 and older.
- Many people rely on an informal network of transportation either providing or getting rides from friends and relatives.
- Most people in the county know about Senior Services Transportation; about one quarter of the households have a member who has used the service. You are much more likely to use the service if you live in the Stevenson/Carson area.
- Most of those who have used the service (all of those 65 and older) rate it as excellent or good.
- Almost 75 percent of the community believe Skamania County needs more public transportation services; they think the two most important services to provide are more dial-a-ride for the transportation disadvantaged including the

- elderly and disabled and after school services for children. Seniors think intercity service to Hood River is the second most important need.
- Almost 75 percent of people say they support a 3/10th of one percent sales tax to pay for services for the transportation disadvantaged. Over 60 percent say they support such a tax for general public service. This percent often overestimates the number who will actually vote for a tax increase.

The survey includes the completed responses of 295 individuals. This study looks at total responses from all those questioned as well as by geographic location-east, central and west- and age-65 and older and younger than 65-to understand any differences in travel patterns and issues among these groups. It is important to note that the responses by age and geographic location are less reliable than the answers from the whole sample because there are fewer responses; in some cases their statistical reliability cannot be verified. That means that the responses from the total sample are more likely to represent the opinions of all residents of the county than those broken down by age and location are to represent the county residents in each of those categories.

Of the 295 people surveyed, 61 percent are women and 39 percent are men. Twenty-four percent are 65 and older, another 19 percent are between 55 and 64, 15 percent are between 35 and 44, 9 percent between 25 and 35 and 11 percent are between 16 and 24. The survey excluded anyone younger than 16.

Figure 1
Survey Respondents by Age



The survey asked where respondents live. Figure 2 shows the geographic distribution of the respondents and indicates that 9 percent of the respondents live in the west part of the county, 71 percent in the central area and 21 percent in the eastern part. The last column of Figure 2 shows the actual percentage of the population living in each of

the communities from where the survey got responses. It does not add up to 100 percent, in part, because we were not able to reach all communities in the county. But the survey was able to get responses from the west, central and east parts. Interestingly, 23 percent of the respondents living in Carson are 65 or older while only 16 percent of those in Stevenson are.

Figure 2
Place of Residence
N=295

LOCATION	TOTAL	WEST	CENTRAL	EAST	Percent of Actual Population (2001)
	100 %	9%	71%	21%	100 percent = 9,900
Carson	32%		XXX		20%
Stevenson	26%		XXX		12%
Underwood	15%			XXX	13%
N. Bonneville	9%		XXX		5%
Skamania	9%	XXX			5%
Home Valley	5%			XXX	(part of Carson)
Stabler	3%		XXX		10%
Beacon Rock	1%			XXX	NA
Mill A	<1% (1)			XXX	3%

TRAVEL PATTERNS

When respondents were asked where they most frequently travel to, outside of their community, 28 percent said Hood River, 23 percent said Portland and 16 percent said Vancouver. Table 3 shows responses to this question. Travel patterns differ somewhat by county sub area. Those who live in the east part of the county are more likely to travel to Hood River than Portland or Vancouver, while people who live in the central area are more likely to travel to Portland. Not surprisingly, people who live in the west part of the county are more likely to go to Vancouver than are those who live in the other parts

Figure 3
Where do you most frequently travel?

N=295

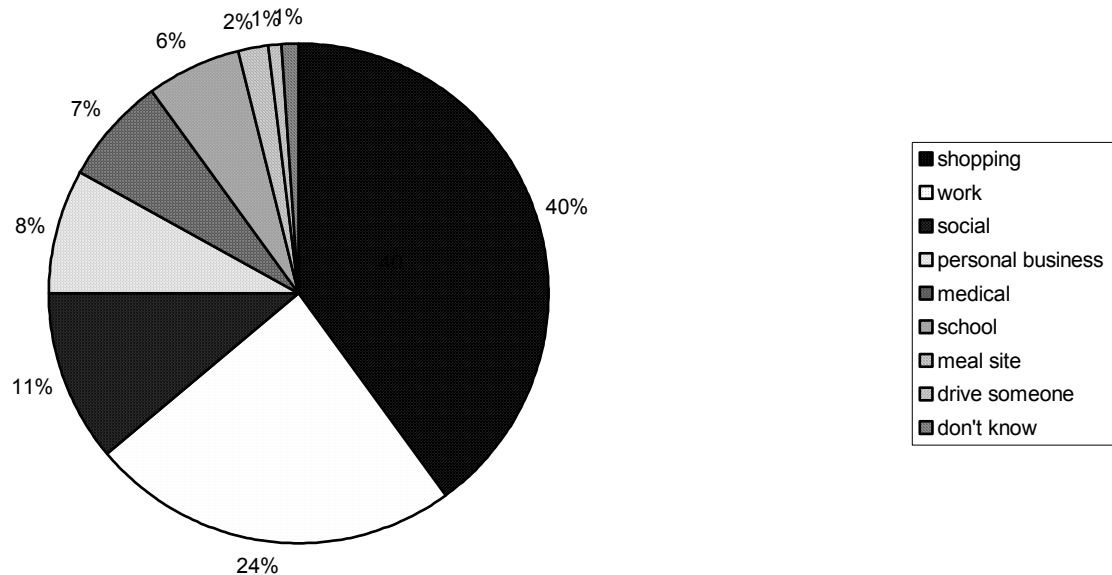
Community	Percent
Hood River	28%
Portland	23 %
Vancouver	16%
Stevenson	8%
Gresham	5%
White Salmon/ Klickitat County	4%
The Dalles	3%
Washogal	3%
Elsewhere in Clark county	1%
Camas	1%
Home Valley	1%
Carson	1%
Cascade Locks	1%
N. Bonneville	1%
Out of Area	2%
Other	1%

Those 65 and older have different travel patterns. They are much more likely to travel to Hood River (41 percent) than is the total sample. The second most frequent destination for senior travelers is Stevenson (13 percent) followed by Portland and Vancouver(10 percent each).

When asked how frequently they make this trip, 26 percent said daily, 20 percent said less than once a week, while 53 percent make the trip between 1 and 4 times a week. This indicates that most trips are not work related. This is supported by the answers to the next question about trip purpose. Those 65 and older travel less frequently with only 4 percent traveling five times a week or more.

As Figure 4 shows, respondents travel most frequently to go shopping (40 percent), followed by work (24 percent). For those under 65, 30 percent travel most frequently to work. Not surprisingly those 65 and older make significantly fewer work trip (4 percent) and more shopping trips. Also, while medical trips account for only 7 percent of trips for the total sample, they make up 21 percent of most frequent travel for those in the older group. Those who live in the central part of the county are less likely to be traveling to work (20 percent) than in the two other sections (west 24 percent, east 34 percent).

Figure 4
Trip Purpose



When asked how they usually traveled, 87 percent said they drive their car. Another 9 percent said they get a ride with someone else and 3 percent said they use senior services. All those who said they use senior services (9 respondents) live in the central part of the county. Seniors are slightly less likely to drive their cars (83 percent) and somewhat more likely to use senior services (7 percent). Of the nine people who reported using senior services regularly, five were 65 and older and four were under 65.

DIFFICULTY GETTING WHERE YOU NEED TO GO

The survey asked a series of questions about difficulty getting to places or activities within the last 12 months. When asked if they or someone in their household lost a job, missed work or decided not to take a job because of a lack of transportation five percent or 15 people said yes. A third or five of those people said the job they had trouble getting to is in Vancouver. Two people each identified Portland, Hood River, Stevenson and elsewhere in Clark County.

When asked if their children have not been able to participate in after school or other activities because of a lack of transportation, four percent or 13 people said yes. While most of these people said these activities are in Stevenson, this may simply reflect the large percentage of respondents who live in Stevenson. It may also reflect the fact that the county recreation program is located there.

When asked if they or someone in their household missed, canceled or did not schedule a medical appointment because of a lack of transportation, nine percent or 27 people said yes. When asked where they had needed to go, 37 percent each said Hood River or Vancouver, 33 percent or nine people mentioned Portland, 19 percent or five people said Stevenson and 15 percent or four people said The Dalles. People could identify more than one destination so these numbers add up to more than 100 percent. Getting to medical appointments seems to be easier for those 65 and older with only 3 percent reporting missing an appointment as opposed to 11 percent for those under 65.

When asked if they or someone in their household has not taken a trip for any other purpose because of a lack of transportation eleven percent said yes. Again those 65 and older fared better with only seven percent answering yes compared to 12 percent of those under 65. Of 32 people who answered yes to this question, 47 percent said they were unable to go to Portland, while 41 percent mentioned Hood River, 41 percent, Vancouver and 19 percent Stevenson.

Figure 5
Difficulty Getting Places

N=295

Difficulty Getting To	Job	Medical	After School Activities	Other Activities
% Total	5%	9%	4%	11%
% 65 and older	1%	3%	-	7%
% Under 65	6%	11%	6%	12%

To gain a better understanding of the informal transportation network in Skamania County, the survey asked respondents if they have had to rely on someone else for transportation and if they have had to provide transportation for others. Of those surveyed, 28 percent said they have had to depend on someone else and 56 percent said they have provided transportation for someone else. In the east part of the county only 16 percent have had to rely on a friend or relative.

KNOWLEDGE OF SENIOR SERVICES TRANSPORTATION

The survey asked a series of questions about the senior services transportation program. While this program focuses on seniors and Medicaid trips, services are open to the general public if there is room. Of those surveyed, 86 percent said they were aware of the program. Awareness of the program was much higher in the central part of the county at 91 percent than in either the west (81 percent) or the east (71 percent). When just those 65 and older are considered, 94 percent of them are aware of the program.

When asked if they or anyone in their household has used this service, 28 percent said yes. Again this was much higher in the central part of the county at 30 percent than in

the west at 4 percent or the east at 10 percent. Use by seniors is at 36 percent as opposed to 25 percent for those under 65.

Of those 71 people who have used the service, 45 percent rate it excellent and 45 percent rate it good. Only 1 person rated it poor and only 4 rated it fair. All of the 24 seniors who have used the service rated it good or excellent. Of the 5 people who rated the service fair or poor, three said it was because they have not been able to rely on them for rides when they need them.

NEED FOR ADDITIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

The survey asked if the respondent strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement *Skamania County needs additional public transportation services. (Public transportation services could include scheduled bus service within the county or to other areas, vanpool service for commuters, dial-a-ride service within the county or to other areas).* Almost 3/4th of the respondents (74 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed. Only 1 percent strongly disagreed, while 19 percent disagreed. Those 65 and older were slightly less likely to support additional services with 67 percent either strongly agreeing or agreeing.

The survey asked what destinations public transit should serve. Respondents could identify more than one location if they chose. As Figure 6 shows, Portland, Vancouver and Hood River were most frequently mentioned. Those from the east part of the county did not mention Portland and Vancouver as frequently as did those living in the central and west part of the county. They did however frequently mention Stevenson (32 percent) and White Salmon/Klickitat County (35 percent) as important destinations to serve. Of the total sample 13 percent said it was most important for transit to serve medical facilities and 11 percent said shopping without identifying a specific destination. Six people said either transit should serve no destinations or they don't want public transit in Skamania County. Eight percent said they don't know what destinations public transit to serve.

Figure 6
Most Frequently Selected Destinations Transit Should Serve*

<i>Destination</i>	Portl'd	Vancouver	Hood River	Stevenson	White Salmon	Carson	The Dalles	N. Bonneville	Gresham
<i>% of total</i>	49%	48%	47%	22%	22%	15%	14%	6%	6%

* most frequently=more than five percent of the sample

Other destinations mentioned by more than 1 percent include: Skamania (5 percent), places in Clark County other than Vancouver (4 percent), Washougal (3 percent), Camas (3 percent), Underwood (3 percent), Home Valley (3 percent), and Cascade Locks (2 percent).

To understand how important respondents considered different types of transit service, the survey asked them to allocate \$100 among the following services:

- Scheduled intercity bus service to Hood River
- Scheduled intercity bus service to connect with C-Tran
- More dial-a-ride for elderly, disabled and transportation disadvantaged both within the county and to other destinations
- Transportation for children for after school activities.

Respondents did not have to give all services some money and could return part or all of the money unspent if they did not support any of the services; 2 people did just that. Figure 7 shows the average amount of money allocated to each service by all those surveyed and by just those 65 and older. Both the total sample and that part of the sample that is 65 and older give the most money to additional dial-a-ride services. Not surprisingly, seniors give it a somewhat greater amount of their allocation. All those surveyed think services for children are more important than the elderly do. In fact those under 65 give children's service an average of \$25.60. It is interesting to note that seniors think bus service to Hood River is more important than the sample as a whole does. The dollar amounts were similar for the three areas of the county except that people in the east part of the county allocated a higher amount of dollars-\$21.10- to service to Hood River than did the other two areas. In addition to the identified categories, eight people wanted to allocate some of their money to other services such as medical transportation and service to specific sites.

Figure 7
Support for Services

	Intercity to Hood River	Connect to CTran	Dial-A-Ride	After school Activities
Average \$ for total Sample	\$15.50	\$12.80	\$40.60	\$23.40
Average \$ 65+	\$24.50	\$10.30	\$42.10	\$16.00

WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR TRANSIT SERVICES

The survey asked if respondents would support a countywide sales tax of 3/10th of one percent to support public transportation services. Sixty-one percent said yes. The survey asked the 33 percent who said no if they would support such a tax if it went just for services for elderly, disabled and transportation disadvantaged and 35 percent of those 115 people (or 13 percent of the total sample) said yes. These figures most likely overestimate the percentage of people who would actually vote for a tax increase.

Figure 8
Support for Sales Tax for Public Transportation

Support for tax for E/D (n=295)	74%
Support for tax for general services (n=295)	64%

Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups

This section presents the results of interviews with stakeholder listed below and focus group meetings with senior citizens and caseworkers. The list below identifies the organizations that participated in stakeholder interviews or the caseworker focus group. The senior citizen groups was open to the public and over 25 elders attended

STAKEHOLDERS

County Recreation and Events
 Real Estate Broker
 Mid-Columbia Health Clinic
 Work First Program
 Domestic Violence
 Skamania County Economic
 Development
 Skyline Hospital

Skamania Lodge
 Bonneville Resort
 WorkSource
 County Counseling Center
 KSDC
 Williams Kaise Olsen Lumber
 Cook Community Council

FINDINGS

- Senior Services does an excellent job providing trips for medical appointments, to and from the hospital and to many social service appointments. Sometimes for after hours and weekend releases, hospital patients must use White Salmon taxi service. A real estate broker mentions this service when working with older clients to reassure them that they will have a way to get to doctors and hospital.
- Residents of the Stevenson-Carson area are much more likely to use the service than those living in the either the east or west end of the county. N. Bonneville Headstart program was unaware or had forgotten that SS would provide rides for medical appointments.
- Many seniors find going through the Medicaid brokerage service to get an appointment inconvenient and unpleasant.
- Several social service programs in the county have small pots of money to help provider transportation. They may use it for gas coupons or to help repair cars as well as paying for rides or mileage. KSDC had a program to help people get back their drivers' licenses.
- Employers in county do not hear from workers that transportation is a problem. Employers believe there is a high rate of carpooling. Skamania Lodge has, in some instances, given employees advances to get cars fixed.
- Employees might well use some transportation service especially in bad weather

- Social service workers note that getting to jobs even within the county is a big problem for many of their clients. They must rely on others to get them there.
- Transportation to anything but medical appointments is a real problem for many people. Seniors note that they have limited options to get places for social activities.
- Greyhound is not much use. The schedule gives a traveler only two hours in Portland and it is hard to get information about the service.
- Clark Community College offers programs for people reentering the job market that many people in Skamania County cannot attend because they can't get there.
- Many people walk from Carson to Stevenson to access services.
- There is a need for service connecting Hood River through Stevenson to Vancouver.
- Transit service that connects with C-Tran at the Camas park and ride would help many people get to jobs and other services.
- Many seniors cannot or will not walk more than a very short distance for transportation while younger people would be willing to walk a long distance to get to transportation service.
- Youngsters living in the outlying areas of the county are not able to access programs offered by the county recreation program.
- Large numbers of transit dependant people live in the Carson area.
- Some people do not believe that public transportation other than senior services is needed or will work because of low-density rural population spread over a large area.

CONCLUSIONS

- Senior Services does an excellent job. This service provides rides for medical some social service trips, and monthly shopping trips to Hood River and Vancouver. It will transport others if rides are available.
- Lack of other transportation services is a quality of life issue for many people who cannot pursue activities that they want or need to.
- People living outside of Stevenson\Carson are less likely to avail themselves of SS or have access to programs in Stevenson
- There is a definite need for a regular daily service that connects Skamania County with C-Tran and Hood River.
- While many younger people are willing to walk long distances to this service, older people may need transportation to it. Moreover this service cannot serve distant locations. Therefore this service should be augmented by some type of additional demand response or feeder service that is not purpose specific.

Service Providers

This section summarizes the survey of public and private transportation providers conducted as part of the Skamania County Public Transportation Feasibility Study and presents findings regarding opportunities to coordinate services and other conclusions. The survey was conducted via telephone interviews with 15 transportation providers,

each of whom had received a written questionnaire in advance. The results of an independent survey of school transportation providers – also undertaken as a part of this project – are presented separately. The purpose of this survey was to identify existing transportation services available to residents of Skamania County and transportation providers operating in adjacent counties and elsewhere in the Columbia Gorge, and to assess opportunities for coordinating transit services in order to address unmet mobility needs of county residents.

We conducted the interviews during November and December, based on a list of public and private transit providers that had been developed with the assistance of the Skamania County Transportation Policy Committee.

Clearly Skamania County Senior Services is the main provider of transportation within the county. With funding from a combination of sources including Washington State Rural Mobility funds, FTA Section 5311 funding (for rural and small city providers), funding from the county and donations, Senior Services provided over 11,000 rides in 2002. While the majority of rides they provide are within the county and within Stevenson and or between Stevenson and Carson, they also provide some scheduled service to Hood River and the Portland area as well as taking people to medical appointments wherever they need to go. The service is open to the general public as well as seniors. Medical trips receive priority; it is not possible to get a ride into Vancouver for a job interview, for example, unless a vehicle is making the trip for a medical appointment.

Major findings of this survey and series of interviews are:

- There are very few transportation services currently available to Skamania residents who don't drive or own a car. Skamania Senior Services, a county agency, provides the vast majority of all non-pupil transportation assistance available to local residents. No evening or weekend service is available, with the exception of Greyhound, which offers scheduled service along Route 14 once a day in either direction.
- Existing transport services within the county seem to be best adapted to the medical transportation needs of Medicaid recipients and providing access to human services for seniors and other agency clients. They appear to be less adequate in terms of assuring access to employment and training opportunities outside Skamania County, assisting non-Medicaid clients get to medical appointments, and in meeting many after-school activity travel needs of pupils and other residents.
- Other than Senior Services and Greyhound, the only transportation options in Skamania County are operated by a private daycare center, a publicly funded head start center, and a private tour operator. Collectively, these agencies operate a total of three vehicles. Two of the three agencies are not interested in transporting anybody but their own clients or in coordinating with other providers.

- Among the other transportation providers operating within the Columbia Gorge, there is substantial unused capacity – mainly in the form of underutilized vehicles – and considerable interest in improving regional and intercity connections and coordinating services with a Skamania-based transit provider.
- Potential exists for linking transportation services with C-TRAN routes in Clark County and with existing transit services available in Klickitat County, Hood River and Cascade Locks.

Regional Provider Summary

Six of the 15 providers surveyed operate in Skamania County. Another six are based in either Clark or Klickitat Counties. The remaining three providers are based and operate exclusively on the Oregon side of the Columbia River. The following summary of all the providers in the region lists each agency by state and county:

Skamania County, WA*Senior Services*

Skamania Senior Services is a county agency established to meet a broad range of the needs of older residents. It first began providing transportation to its clients in 1970. In 1990, its transportation services were extended to Medicaid recipients. Those transit services were expanded still further in 1995 with the receipt of funding from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), so that, today, the agency's transit services are open to the public.

Level of Service: 1,700 trips per month. Roughly 60 percent of all trips are demand response. Three times a week, deviated fixed route service is provided to the senior center, post office and bank and for shopping purposes. Slightly more than half of all trips begin and end in Skamania County. However, 45 percent of the trips – mostly medical – are to destinations outside the county such as Hood River and Vancouver.

Operating Budget: Medicaid reimbursements make up about 1/3 of the Senior Services budget. An equivalent amount comes from the state in form of federal rural transit funding (Sec. 5311). The county contributes an additional 16 percent, the Area Agency on Aging 5 percent, with the balance being made up by contributions from agency partners and rider donations.

Vehicle Fleet: Senior Services operates a total of six vehicles – four mini-vans, and two small buses. Four of the vehicles are

accessible and all are equipped with radios or cell phones. In addition, the agency relies on five or six regular volunteer drivers who use their own cars to transport ambulatory Medicaid recipients to medical appointments.

Unmet Needs: Agency staff would like to see county employment transportation opportunities expanded. They see a need to get the under-60 population to jobs and DSHS training. They also see an unmet need for after-school transportation and for park and recreation transportation for kids. If resources were available, a high priority would be to provide evening and weekend service to county residents.

Coordination Opportunities: Currently, Senior Services coordinates its occasional trips to Hood River with Mt. Adams Transit in Klickitat County. Agency staff would be interested in exploring possible interlining arrangements with C-TRAN in Clark County.

Greyhound

Greyhound Lines is a scheduled, intercity carrier that operates passenger and package service on both the Washington and Oregon sides of the Columbia River. In Skamania County, Greyhound buses stop at the General Store in the town of Skamania, The Matt in Stevenson and the Chevron in North Bonneville twice each day – once Eastbound (3:30 pm, 3:40 pm and 3:50 pm, respectively), and once Westbound (10:50 am, 11:00 am and 11:10 am). This service will end in June 2003.

Service to the Area: During the last six months, about 1,800 Greyhound passengers traveled through Skamania County, with less than 15 percent stopping in the county. Greyhound estimates that only 30-45 tickets are sold monthly with destinations in Skamania County or Cascade Locks, OR.

Challenges: Since Greyhound service is geared to the needs of larger markets, schedules are not particularly convenient for county residents. Furthermore, because of its schedule, Greyhound currently does not address the travel needs of commuters going to Vancouver or Portland, nor can Skamania residents use Greyhound for convenient round-trips to other destinations outside the county.

Coordination Opportunities: Regional Greyhound staff are interested in sharing ticketing and passenger waiting facilities with a local transit provider in Skamania County. They would also be interested in

having a public carrier in the county become an official Greyhound ticket agent. However, it is estimated that such an agent would not collect more than \$50-\$75 in monthly commission fees.

Explore the Gorge

Explore the Gorge is a small, private company that primarily provides pre-arranged travel for hiking and tour groups. Roughly 10 percent of the trips originate or end in Portland or PDX airport.

Service Area: Based in Stevenson, WA, Explore the Gorge operates throughout Skamania County and the Columbia River Gorge.

Vehicle Fleet: The company operates one, non-lift-equipped 15-passenger van. The owner estimates that the vehicle is in use an average of only six hours a day between April and November, and is virtually dormant from November through March. In other words, only 35 percent of the vehicle's capacity is currently being used.

Coordination Opportunities: The current owner is very interested in expanding her transit-related business in the county and would be open to coordinating services with other agencies and providers.

Blue Star Services

Blue Star Services is a Portland-based company that contracts with Skamania Lodge to provide shuttle services between PDX airport and the Lodge.

Service Area: Unknown.

Vehicle Fleet: Unknown.

Coordination Opportunities: Unknown.

Rock Creek Day Care

Provider is a private agency that transports children to and from its own day care center.

Service Area: Serves the towns of Stevenson, Carson and No. Bonneville.

Vehicle Fleet: The agency operates one, non-lift-equipped 15-passenger van. Staff estimates that only 25 percent of the vehicle's capacity is currently being used.

Coordination Opportunities: Present agency leadership does not see opportunities to increase coordination. Staff is not interested either in expanding transportation services or coordinating its current services with other agencies.

Head Start

Mid-Columbia Head Start is a nonprofit agency that administers the pre-school program in Washington State and Oregon. It provides transportation to the 18 kids enrolled in Skamania County's Head Start program.

Service Area: Provides transportation from all parts of the county to the Head Start classroom in North Bonneville.

Vehicle Fleet: The agency operates one, non-lift-equipped 23-passenger bus. Staff estimates that, on the average, vehicle is in use only two-three hours each day.

Coordination Opportunities: The agency's transportation coordinator has never considered coordinating with other providers and is not interested in expanding transportation services or coordinating services with other agencies.

Clark County, WA

C-TRAN

C-TRAN is the public transit entity serving Vancouver and Clark County. The agency offers fixed route and paratransit bus services within the County and also provides commuter bus service to Portland, OR. Additionally, C-TRAN is the lead agency for all of Clark County's commute trip reduction activities, including organizing car and vanpool services.

Level of Service: C-TRAN provides about 6.5 million trips annually. Roughly 20 percent are ADA-related and almost one-quarter are classified as commuter trips. Regulations limit C-TRAN's operations to Clark County and the Portland metro area. No transit service is currently provided in Skamania County.

Vehicle Fleet: C-TRAN operates 100 standard-size coaches plus an additional 60 smaller, body-on-chassis buses. Virtually all are accessible, except its commuter fleet.

Coordination Opportunities: C-TRAN staff expressed a strong interest in building partnerships and coordinating services with other providers. They have suggested connecting with a Skamania County service at their transit center at Fishers Landing, which is in the eastern part of Clark County, adjacent to State Route 14.

Human Services Council HSC is a nonprofit agency based in Vancouver. It is the designated Area Agency on Aging (AAA) for Southwestern Washington, and also operates as the regional Medicaid transportation broker for Clark, Klickitat and Skamania and two other counties.

Types of Services: HSC does not operate any vehicles of its own or provide transportation services directly. Instead, it funds senior transportation under the Older American, and contracts out non-emergency Medicaid transportation to providers in the five-county region. In Skamania County, the broker contracts with Senior Services for all senior transportation and for roughly 95 percent of Medicaid trips that originate in the county. HSC also contracts with Catholic Community Services of Clark County and A-1 Transportation in Camas to pick up occasional trips in Skamania County.

Level of Service: HCS estimates that roughly 4,500 Medicaid trips will be provided to Skamania residents this year (375 per month). That's up from 2,800 in 2000.

Challenges: For several years, HCS staff tried to develop an employment transportation initiative in Skamania County, but were unsuccessful – allegedly because of the county's small and scattered population base and lack of major employment centers. Staff feels that local officials could be more flexible in supporting a broader range of public transit services.

Unmet Needs: The following were identified as the major transportation problems in Skamania County: Lack of transportation for Medicare beneficiaries; unsponsored trips generally; transportation needs arising from domestic violence in the county; and the needs of the county's homeless population.

Coordination Opportunities: HSC staff strong support the expansion of public transit services in Skamania County and have expressed interest in cooperating with all local providers.

Catholic Services:

Catholic Community Services of Clark County is a faith-based nonprofit agency with offices in Vancouver and Longview, WA. Under a contract with the state's Volunteer Chore program, CCS provides transportation services to low income elderly and disabled residents of Clark, Skamania and two other counties. The agency also contracts with the Human Services Council (HSC) to provide transportation for Medicaid recipients and adults aged 60 and over in Clark and Skamania Counties.

Types of Services:

All of CCS' transportation services are free and are provided by volunteer drivers utilizing their own vehicles. CCS reimburses its three Skamania County volunteers \$0.345 per mile for all trips. Additionally, Clark County-based drivers are available for occasional Skamania trips.

Unmet Needs:

CCS staff identified significant unmet transportation needs – especially medical trips – for groups of Skamania residents who “fall through the cracks”, i.e. slightly higher income older persons who are not enrolled in publicly subsidized programs and are “nobody's clients.” Additional needs were identified among veterans, injured workers seeking Worker Compensation assistance, and enrollees in Washington State's Work First and Work Source programs.

Coordination

As an agency already providing some transportation services

Opportunities:

in Skamania County, CCS officials expressed strong interest in assisting county officials to expand and improve mobility services. Agency staff indicated an interested in participating in any public meetings where transit needs in Skamania Co. and possible solutions were being discussed.

A-1 Transportation

A-1 Transportation is a small, cab company that provides public taxi services in Clark and Skamania Counties. The company also provides medical trips to Medicaid recipients in Clark and Skamania Counties under a contract with the Human Services Council.

Service Area:

From its base in Camas, WA, the company serves residents of eastern Clark County and all of Skamania County.

Vehicle Fleet:

Unknown at this time.

Coordination Opportunities: Unknown at this time.

Klickitat County, WA

*Mt. Adams
Transportation*

Mt. Adams Transportation Service (MATS) is operated by Klickitat Senior Services, a county agency. Originally established to meet the mobility needs of seniors in the community, MATS currently provides a full range of transit services to the general public, Medicaid recipients, unemployed workers and human service agency clients. MATS also helped to create a Public Transit Betterment District in the county, but the district has never been funded.

Types of Service: MATS provides about 2,800 trips per month. All of its service within Klickitat County is demand response, plus it operates flexible, semi-scheduled service to Hood River and the Dalles twice a day. Most of the trips are provided on MATS' vehicles, but the agency also utilizes the services of 12 volunteer drivers who use their own cars. In addition, a few trips each month (less than 1 percent) consist of transporting patients discharged from the hospital in White Salmon to their homes in Skamania County.

Vehicle Fleet: The agency has a total of eight accessible vehicles, with six in daily service. Staff estimates that only about 50 percent of available vehicle capacity currently is being utilized.

Pupil Coordination Issues: Recently MATS discontinued transporting some pupils because local school officials thought they were barred from contracting with outside providers. However, MATS continues to provide transportation for kindergarten children but without reimbursement. The agency does have an agreement with a PTA group in White Salmon to provide transportation for after-school activities. Under another contract with a day care agency, MATS provides morning and afternoon transportation between the day care facility and a local public school.

Coordination Opportunities: Agency staff expressed interest in coordination – possibly by providing Underwood and residents in the eastern parts of Skamania County. They are also extremely interested in finding additional resources in order to resume making four daily trips to Hood River and The Dalles. It was thought

that such an expanded service also would benefit residents of both counties, particularly if it was coordinated.

E & R Taxi

E & R Taxi is a small, privately owned cab company that provides public taxi services in Klickitat and Skamania Counties.

Service Area: According to the owner, the company can operate within a 75-mile range of its base in White Salmon.

Vehicle Fleet: The company operates one cab -- a non-lift-equipped passenger car. The owner estimates that the vehicle is in use 10-12 hours, seven days a week.

Coordination Opportunities: The current owner was not aware of any unmet needs in Skamania County, and acknowledged that he had not considered coordinating services with providers in the area.

Hood River County, OR

Columbia Area Transit

CAT is a public transit district, providing service throughout Hood River County, including one-day-week service between the towns of Hood River and Odell, Parkdale and Cascade Locks. In addition, Columbia Area Transit has a scheduled run to Portland once a month, and, during winter months, provides weekend services for skiers to Mt. Hood Meadows in an adjoining county.

Level of Service: CAT provides roughly 2,000 trips per month to the general public – about 24,000 annually.

Types of Service: Virtually all of its service is demand response. CAT's staff estimates that two out of five riders are elderly and that nearly one-quarter are disabled. Under a special cost-reimbursement arrangement with parents, CAT transports 8-9 pupils each weekday to a private school in The Dalles. The transit agency also provides special trips and activities for disabled students. However, it is not reimbursed by the school district for this service. Under a recent agreement with the Mid-Columbia Council of Governments, CAT will become a provider under MCCOG's new regional medical transportation brokerage, transporting Medicaid recipients to appointments in Hood River and the Portland area.

Vehicle Fleet: CAT operates 11 vans and buses, although only three are generally used in daily service. Its fleet includes one 6-passenger mini-van, one small 12-passenger bus, either medium-sized buses, and one 45-passenger over-the-road coach. All but the mini-van are lift and radio equipped.

Intercity Coordination: CAT was the lead applicant – on behalf of a regional group of transit providers – on a successful ODOT application to improve service coordination within the Gorge. Both CAT and its partners are extremely interested in addressing coordination issues on both sides of the Columbia River.

Other Coordination Opportunities: CAT staff expressed an interest in improving transportation services between Hood River and Skamania Counties. For instance, interest was expressed in exploring how to take advantage of CAT's existing but limited service to Cascade Locks, just across the river from Skamania County. Also, CAT staff acknowledged that they currently had more buses than they needed, which might allow them to lease vehicles to providers serving Skamania County if needed there.

Gorge Express:

The Columbia Gorge Express is a small, private company operated by the owner of the Hood River Hotel. Originally set up as a supplemental service for hotel guests, it now provides shuttle services to PDX in Portland, handles small group charters and offers medical trips to the Portland metro area.

Service Area: Based in the town of Hood River, the Gorge Express mainly operates in Hood River and Wasco Counties, but is licensed to operate anywhere in Washington and Oregon.

Vehicle Fleet: The company operates a lift-equipped 12-passenger van and a non-lift-equipped small bus. The owner estimates that less than a third of both vehicles' capacities are currently being utilized.

Coordination Opportunities: The current owner is very interested in expanding her transit-related business in the county and would be open to coordinating services with other agencies and providers.

Wasco County, OR

The Link

Public transportation in The Dalles and Wasco County is provided by The Link – a transit service operated by the Mid-Columbia Council of Governments. The Link’s transit center in The Dalles is shared with Greyhound Lines and other intercity carriers.

Types of Service: The Link offers 100 percent demand response, curb-to-curb service, providing approximately 2,500 trips per month to Wasco County residents. In addition to coordinating public transit services in the region, MCCOG was designated recently as a regional Medicaid transportation broker, assuring access to health care for Medicaid recipients along a 100-mile corridor on the Oregon side of the Columbia River.

Vehicle Fleet: The Link operates a total of three vans and eight buses. All of its vehicles are accessible and equipped with two-way radios.

Intercity COG staff recognizes a need for more transportation services

Coordination: within the Gorge, and would like to see expansion, for example, of intercity-bus service to assure connections from The Dalles and Hood River to Skamania County and the Washington side of the Columbia River.

Other Coordination Opportunities: As a regional transportation entity, MCCOG currently coordinates its transportation activities with Greyhound and local transit providers in five counties. COG staff indicated that they were quite interested in exploring mutually beneficial coordination activities with future transit providers in Skamania County, specifically including looking at joint purchasing and vehicle leasing arrangements.

Pupil Transportation

While numerous efforts are being made to coordinate public and pupil transportation throughout the state and there have been some successes, there are numerous differences between these two types of service. This section discusses the organization of pupil transportation in Washington, identifies services within Skamania County and discusses opportunities for coordination. Perhaps, the greatest opportunity comes with the development of the Stevenson/Carson School District after school program for

middle school children. The school district has agreed to work with the county to provide after school transportation to any child who attends school within the district.

FINDINGS

- Limited funding and scarce resources restrict possibilities for coordination between public and public transportation in Skamania County.
- School districts are willing to work with the county if an appropriate opportunity presents itself.
- Currently there are no after school transportation programs and as a result limited school extra curricular opportunities.
- The new Stevenson/Carson after school program may present an opportunity for after school transportation for students who go to school in that district.

HOW PUPIL TRANSPORTATION IS ORGANIZED

Although federal law guarantees a student a right to an education, neither it nor Washington State law requires that the student be provided transportation.

For this reason, individual districts may elect to or not provide transportation for their students. An exception to this is the special needs student whose Individual Education Program (IEP) specifies transportation as a related service.

Should a district choose to provide transportation, they may elect to provide the service in-house, contractor join a cooperative agreement with another district or contract with a private provider. The following explains the details of school bus system operations.

Vehicles

Design:

The vehicle most often used by public school districts is the common yellow school bus. Based on availability or a district's specific need, 10 (or less) passenger vans, 4-wheel drive vehicles, community transit, etc. may also be used.

Acquisition:

New vehicles are usually acquired through an open bid process. For the most part, this is due to the cost of the vehicle and state purchasing rules. In cases in which a district chooses to not conduct their own bid, they may purchase through another school district's open bid or through a cooperative purchasing program, such as King County Director's Association.

- Maintenance: Vehicle maintenance is most often provided in-house. Very small districts often contract with a larger neighboring district for this service or to form a transportation co-op with other area districts.
- Inspection: All public school buses are inspected at least once annually by the Washington State Patrol. In addition, a second inspection of one-fourth of each district's fleet is conducted on a "surprise" basis. Following a successful inspection, a current inspection sticker is issued. To legally operate a school bus in Washington State a current sticker must be adhered to the windshield of the bus.
- Funding: New vehicles are front funded by the district and are purchased with Capital or Bus Depreciation funds. Capital funding is usually a set aside fund from the district's general fund or levy/bond specific funding. Bus Depreciation is a state supported funding system designed to enable districts to replace aging vehicles. This system provides annual funding based on the anticipated life span of a specific (size/type) bus. Although a district may elect to purchase a bus equipped with options (instant chains, a larger engine/transmission, increased seating) due to their specific needs the state's funding is based on the basic options for that model. With the reimbursement funding being broken into annual payments (less anticipated earned interest) based on the number of years the bus is expected to remain in operation, the district is expected to save these funds until the bus reaches the end of it's life span. This formula does not allow for a decreased life span due to accelerated mileage. In addition, because this funding is based on current pricing, if the actual basic vehicle cost goes down, so does that year's funding.

Drivers

- Recruitment: School bus drivers are recruited through the normal hiring process (i.e. classified ads, word of mouth, etc). School districts may also participate in a personnel co-op offered by the local Educational Service District. In this case, the personnel co-op conducts the recruitment process for the district.
- Training: All school bus drivers within the State of Washington are required to be trained to state approved standards.

Individuals, recruited by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, design the program and train school district employed driver trainers. These trainers then train all new district hired school bus drivers. In addition to the initial training, all school bus drivers are required to participate in annual refresher training.

Unions: Based on individual district employee preference, employees may elect to join a union.

Operations

Staffing: The district (or the provider) chooses how to staff the actual operation.

Programs: Based on specific need and the availability of funding, the district may choose to provide transportation for to/from school, mid-day kindergarten, activity/after school, enrichment/before school, teen mom programs, special needs routes, field trips, sporting events, etc.

Schedules: Transportation routing and schedules are usually determined by school start/end times (bell times), the number of riders, the size of the district (travel distance) and the number of buses/vehicles available.

Insurance: Insurance is most often purchased through cooperative agreements with other districts. This service is provided by the Educational Service Districts.

Funding: State operational funding supports to/from school transportation only. The actual amount of this funding is determined through a student count taken each October on the "to" school routes. Through a formula that includes the average "to" school ridership (which is doubled to allow for the return trip) and a maximum straight-line mileage, the district's operational funding is determined.

Many districts feel that the current formula does not adequately address real costs. State funding rules allow for a recount should the district's ridership increase by a set percentage but small on-going increases that ultimately require that the district add a bus to a route do not. In addition, many districts see increased "from school" ridership (which can not be included in the "to" school

count) and actual mileage that exceeds the set maximum. In rural districts the bus must often travel beyond the last drop point to turn-around. These miles are also not included in the formula. If this funding does not meet actual district transportation costs, the difference comes from the district's general fund. Because the general fund also funds student education (staff/teacher salaries, books, building costs, insurance, etc), districts are often very reluctant to provide anything more than to/from school transportation.

SKAMANIA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND TRANSPORTATION

Mill A School District: A small K-8 school district which currently utilizes 3 of their own radio- and cell phone-equipped buses, provides in-house transportation for their students with a staff of two drivers. The district also provides transportation for their high school students who attend Stevenson/Carson School District. Special Needs transportation is contracted to the Educational Service District #112 (ESD #112).

The superintendent administers the transportation program, which operates under an annual budget of \$58,790.00. The district receives 89% percent of its funding from the state's transportation operating allocation with the remainder of the funding being derived from the district's general fund.

Neighboring Stevenson/Carson School District where the district also participates in joint driver training agreements performs vehicle maintenance for the district. Routing, which is conducted manually is limited to to/from school transportation for the district's students. While there is an expressed interest on the part of the district to provide more service options for their students and to participate in coordinated transportation agreements, limited funding and staffing have hampered their efforts to date.

Increased funding, an overhaul of the state's funding formula for operations and information regarding the process for assigning transportation costs was expressed as current needs facing the district's transportation program.

Skamania School District: A small K-8 school district that currently uses four of their own radio-equipped buses (plus 1 van), operated by a staff of 3 drivers, provides in-house transportation for their students. The district also provides transportation for their high school students who attend Stevenson/Carson School District. Special Needs transportation is contracted to the Educational Service District #112 (ESD #112).

The superintendent administers the transportation program, which has an annual budget of \$66,899.16. The district receives 86% percent of its funding from the state transportation operating allocation with the remainder of the funding coming from the district's general fund. Neighboring Stevenson/Carson School District performs vehicle maintenance for the district. The district employs a part-time driver trainer on an as needed basis. Routing, which is conducted manually, is limited to to/from school

transportation for the district's students. While there is an expressed interest on the part of the district to provide more service options for their students and to participate in coordinated transportation agreements, limited funding and staffing have hampered their efforts to date. Increased funding as well as an overhaul of the state's funding formula for operations were identified as current needs facing the district's transportation program.

Mt Pleasant School District: A small K-6 school district, which currently uses two district owned radio- and cell phone-equipped buses, provides in-house transportation for their students with a staff on one driver. The district also provides transportation for their high school students who attend Washogal School District. Special Needs transportation is contracted to the Educational Service District #112 (ESD #112).

The superintendent administers the transportation program, which operates under an annual budget of \$33,496.00. The district receives 64% percent of it's funding from the state's transportation operating allocation with the remainder of the funding being derived from the district's general fund.

Neighboring Washogal School District, with which Mt. Pleasant participates in joint driver training agreements, performs vehicle maintenance for the district. Insurance is purchased through a cooperative agreement with ESD #112. Routing, which is conducted manually, is limited to to/from school transportation for the district's students. While there is interest on the part of the district to provide more service options for their students or to possibly participate in coordinated transportation agreements, limited funding and staffing have hampered their efforts to date.

No current needs were expressed however it is safe to assume that funding and the current state operational funding formula leave the district struggling to meet their actual transportation costs.

Stevenson/Carson School District: A small K-12 school district that currently uses 12 of their own radio- and cell phone-equipped buses, provides in-house transportation for their students with a staff of 11 drivers and a transportation manager. Special Needs transportation is contracted to the Educational Service District #112 (ESD#112).

The district employs a full-time supervisor to administer the district's transportation program. Information regarding their annual budget or the source of funding was not supplied although it can be assumed that their situation is very similar to other districts interviewed. A full-time mechanic preforms vehicle maintenance in-house. A part-time driver trainer is employed on an as needed basis. The district does participate in joint purchasing agreements however does not regularly coordinate program related items with their neighboring districts. Routing, which is conducted manually, is currently limited to to/from school transportation for the district's students. Starting in fall 2003, the district will provide after school transportation for middle school students participating in a new established after school program.

District staff wish they could provide more service options for their students, but limited funding and staffing have hampered their efforts to date.

Educational Service District #112 Special Needs Transportation Co-op:

Formed in 1987, the ESD #112 Special Needs Transportation Co-op provides service through contract to 23 school districts and two state schools, which provide services for blind and deaf students. Through this contract agreement, to and from school transportation is provided for students who meet the requirements defined as "special needs". These are students who, for a variety of reasons, have been determined to have educational needs that exceed what can be met through basic education. For students that meet the requirements, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is developed. In most all cases, transportation is part of this plan.

Funding for ESD #112's transportation program is derived from a fee charged to each participating school district as well as through state supported transportation funding. As with all school districts, the amount of this funding is determined through an annual student and mileage count, which occurs each October.

Currently this program serves 23 districts while providing transportation services to approximately 300 special needs student. Because this transportation program is based specifically on an individual student's educational needs, the service area includes the area between the student's home address and the location of the school/program in which the student is enrolled. Due ever-changing student enrollment, the vehicle routing/timing change frequently.

Routing is currently conducted manually with some assistance from a database. The agency is a major provider in the Skamania County area and has expressed an interested in pursuing coordination as a solution to the area's transportation needs.

Funding and the process for recouping costs are issues facing the ESD as the major portion of their state operational funding is determined utilizing the same formula used by the school districts.

KEY PUPIL SYSTEM COMMONALITIES**Commonalties**

Transportation:	In-house
Administration:	Superintendent/small district Transportation Supervisor/medium district
Vehicles:	School Buses
Drivers:	Certified by WA. State Pupil Transportation

Staff Training:	In-house or coordinated among districts
Maintenance:	In-house or coordinated among districts
Purchasing:	Coordinated among districts
Insurance:	Purchased through an insurance pool
Special Needs Trans:	Contracted to ESD #112
Activity Runs:	Do not provide/no state funding
Driver Shortage:	When an issue it is most often due to few hours/low pay
Bus Acquisition:	The current state system requires districts to purchase bus up front/repays costs over a period of years.

Needs

Funding:	State funding does not cover current operating expenses. Vehicle purchases require front funding. This is often difficult for districts with limited budgets.
Activity Runs:	Unable to provide due to lack of funding.
Driver Shortage:	Limited hours and low pay equals high turnover.
Office/ Administrative Staffing:	Limited funding often restricts the number of hours that can be dedicated to administrative/office help. For this reason, districts often face staff shortages and are therefore very reluctant to assume extra duties.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COORDINATION

Before School/Activity Runs

Through a shared system similar to the one operated in Mason County, populations could be combined to create shared commuter runs.

The Mason County model uses Shelton school buses operated by district drivers to provide after school routes. By covering "Shelton School District" lettering on the side of the bus with a magnetic sign that reads "Mason Transit", the bus in essence becomes a transit bus. Through this system ridership is co-mingled to include students as well as the general population. Mason Transit pays all costs associated with these routes.

PROS:

A cost-effective way to provide before and after school transportation for students. Doing so would allow students whom normally would not have the opportunity to participate in enrichment or sports activities.

A cost-effective way to provide commuter runs.

Utilizes taxpayer resources in an efficient manner (buses and operating costs).

Provides drivers an opportunity for increased work.

By using school buses for coordinated transportation, replacement of the same is possible using Rural Mobility grant funds.

CONS:

Creates an environment where co-mingling of passengers may exist.

Increases mileage on school buses.

Shortens the life span on the buses.

Special Needs Transportation

By either co-mingling ridership or by making ESD #112 buses/drivers available during down time, transportation could be provided to the adult populations. Based on origin/destination this system may be best served by developing feeder routes to other services.

Using this model, ESD #112 establishes their rates to include operating as well as overhead costs. Through an established process, monthly billing/payment would occur.

- PROS:**
- A cost-effective way to provide transportation for seniors and disabled members of the community.
 - Provides an opportunity for enrichment, which comes from an appreciation of other generations as well as individuals with disabilities.
 - Utilizes taxpayer resources in an efficient manner (buses and operating costs).
 - Provides drivers an opportunity for increased work.
 - By using school buses for coordinated transportation, replacement of the same is possible using Rural Mobility grant funds.
- CON:**
- Co-mingling of passengers may exist.
 - Increases mileage on school buses.
 - Shortens the life span of the buses.

Bus Acquisition

Purchase buses for districts involved in coordination through the use of Rural Mobility funding.

Agencies involved in coordination are eligible for Rural Mobility grant funding. Through this process, dollars could be provided to districts to purchase buses. Not only would this relieve a burden on already strapped budgets, it would allow the districts to reduce their operating and maintenance costs by allowing them to maintain a realistic surplus/replacement schedule.

- PROS:**
- Provides resources to replace aging buses
 - Reduces operating and maintenance costs by allowing districts to operate newer buses.
 - Allows districts to dedicate limited funds in the classroom.
- CONS:**
- Requires the district/agency to participate in coordination

Driver Shortage

Through coordination additional work is provided, thereby increasing driver hours. The goal is to reduce costly turnover.

- PROS:**
- Increased work/pay

Reduction in staff turnover

Reduction in hiring/training costs

CONS: Drivers would need to be trained to work with adults

Centralized Dispatch Center

Through the development of a centralized dispatch center in either the Skamania or Stevenson/Carson School District, routing for both the school district and coordinated transportation could occur at the same location.

PROS: Provide revenue to increase needed staff time at the district level.

Provide centralized routing using staff familiar with Skamania County.

Provide a cost-effective way to meet both the district and county's supervision and dispatch needs.

Cons: Requires the district/agency to participate in coordination.

Routing Software/Hardware

Acquire Routing Software/Hardware for the school district that is selected to provide the Centralized Dispatch Center.

Work has already begun with a local provider to develop software that allows coordination to occur. The software provides a way for various agencies to share the same "engine" without sharing or allowing access to individual databases.

PROS: Through this model, routing software is provided to interested agencies at a reduced price.

Provides an efficient way to complete the annual pupil transportation funding report.

Provides an efficient way to track costs/statistical figures.

Provides an efficient audit system.

CONS: Requires the district/agency to participate in coordination.

Chapter 3: Needs Assessment and Strategies

This chapter defines unmet needs in Skamania County and then discusses strategies to meet those needs. The major unmet needs are:

- Daily access into the greater Portland/Vancouver area for employment, school, and job training programs
- More connections into Hood River
- More in-county demand-responsive service
- Access home for students participating in after school programs

This report proposes a number of strategies to meet these demands, the most important of which is a zone routing connection to Vancouver. With the receipt of state rural mobility funding, the county will be able to provide additional service. This study recommends that the county provide a zone or flex routing service that connects Skamania County with C-Tran in Clark County. A zone routing service would have a regular time schedule for traveling through areas in a determined direction but would travel throughout each zone to provide door-to-door service as needed. This service would meet three of the county's major transportation needs. It would connect to the greater Portland/Vancouver area daily allowing workers and students access to services and jobs there. It could connect with service into Hood River from White Salmon providing seniors and others with opportunities to fill prescriptions and conduct other personal business activities. It would also increase the amount of demand response service available for seniors especially between Carson and Stevenson.

Other service options include:

- Increased use of volunteers.
- Development of rideshare and vanpool program.
- Development of community vanpool program for outlying communities.
- Exploration with other transportation providers in the gorge of an intercity service that would travel from The Dalles to Hood River on to White Salmon and Stevenson ending in Vancouver.
- Coordination with the school districts to determine if a school pool program is useful to get youngsters to and from after school programs. **ALSO, coordination with Stevenson/Carson School District to advertise that they will provide after school transportation to any child attending school in their district.** This program would be in coordination with the middle school after school program the district is starting this fall.

While the best way to implement these programs would be through the establishment of a Public Transportation Benefits Area with a tax base, this plan determines that because of economic conditions now, the County should explore a PBTA when economic conditions are better. In the meantime, these programs should be the purview of Senior Services. Through a combination of grants and volunteer programs, Senior Services should hire a transportation coordinator that would report to the director of Senior Services. In addition the County should appoint a transportation

committee that would also report to the director of senior services. The County should also adjust the job description and the pay scale for the director of Senior Services to reflect the added responsibility.

Unmet Needs

While an overwhelming majority of Skamania County residents rely on their own vehicles to get them where they need to go, according to the study survey, 13 percent either rely on others or on Senior Services (3 percent) to take them where they most frequently travel. Senior Services does an outstanding job of providing service to those who need it, especially for medical trips. Twenty-eight percent of the households in the county have a member who has used the service. Of those who have used it, 90 percent rank it excellent or good. Still, it has limited resources that are provided mostly through grants and service contracts and it cannot meet all the transportation needs in the county. Therefore there are those whose quality of life suffer.

The telephone survey conducted for this study indicates that nine percent of county residents have difficulty getting transportation to medical appointments and 11 percent to general activities other than medical or work. It also shows that those under 65 have more transportation difficulties than those over 65. Many people must rely on friends and relatives. In our survey 28 percent said they have had to depend on others for rides and 56 percent say they have had to provide riders to others.

This observation is enforced by discussions with school officials, senior citizens and caseworkers. Because the school districts cannot afford to provide after school transportation, many youngsters cannot participate in after school activities. This deprives them of some of the activities that help keep students in school as well as opportunities for scholarships or other forms of recognition and personal growth. Almost all high school students in the county attend Stevenson/Carson high school. For many this is a long distance from their homes and they must have transportation if they are going to stay after school. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the county library and the recreational programs are located in Stevenson. Many kids, including those at risk, cannot get to programs. The library travels throughout the county, but the recreation programs are not able to do this.

Caseworkers are concerned that many clients cannot get to jobs and job programs held in Clark County. For example, Clark County Community College holds job-training programs on its campus, but Skamania County residents trying to enter or reenter the job market cannot get to this useful program. Although Greyhound serves this corridor, its hours make its service virtually useless for most people wanting to get to the greater Portland area. Even within the county, workers may walk several miles to get to a job site if they do not or cannot drive.

One solution offered for this problem has been programs to help people get back their drivers licenses if they have lost them or to repair their cars. Some people believe this is the best solution because employment patterns are too dispersed to provide any

kind of public transportation. However, individual help is also expensive and cars may continue to be unreliable.

Senior citizens and people with disabilities have commented that while they can get to their medical appointments, they would like more freedom to get around the county and to Hood River and the greater Portland area.

The telephone survey indicated that almost 100 percent of the people asked think there should be bus service to the greater Portland/Vancouver area. Second only to this destination is Hood River.

MAJOR SERVICE NEEDS

This study has identified three major service needs.

- **Daily connections into the greater Portland area.** This service should meet the needs of those who are commuting to work or school. This can be accomplished by connecting with C-Tran, perhaps at the Fisher's Landing Transit Center. Perhaps another way to meet this need for some people is to establish **vanpool service** that can take people into Clark County either to connect them with C-Tran or their specific job site.
- **More connections into Hood River.** Many people need to go to Hood River to shop or pick up medical supplies or prescriptions. People over 65 select this as their most important destination. Since it is not a commuter service it does not have to be daily or be scheduled to get people to work. This could be accomplished through coordination with both Mount Adams service in White Salmon and CAT service in Cascade Locks. Skamania County should work with these two other counties to see if there are opportunities not just for connections but also to seek funding.
- **More in-county demand response** service especially in the afternoon to help students get home after school activities and to give seniors more flexibility in traveling. Another approach to meeting student needs is a carpool program called **School Pool**. School pools are targeted school carpooling programs for parents and youth. Another option for students worth exploring is coordination of school district transportation to see if it is possible to free up any routes that could be used for after school activities transportation.

Service Strategies

This section discusses different types of service strategies that can meet the needs identified above. Figure 9 describes these services, their costs, target population and available resources. With the receipt of state rural mobility funds, the county can provide additional services to meet some of the most pressing transportation needs.

This study recommends the development of a zone or flex routing service that travels between Carson/Stevenson and Clark County connecting with C-Tran. This service may also be able to connect with service going to Hood River from White Salmon. Zone routing is a service model in which a vehicle does not have a set

route but has a direction, some key stops and set times to be in different areas or zones. With an advance call of a couple of hours, the riders can receive curb-to-curb service from anywhere within one zone to anywhere within another zone. This service has more flexibility than fixed-route service however riders cannot request pick up at any time they want as in demand response service.

Figure 9
Potential Service Options

Service/description	Serves	Costs/Resources	Tools
Zone route: travel from Stevenson to Clark County to connect with C-Tran and to White Salmon to connect with MATS going into Hood River. Its deviated route would have several set time points but would pick people at requested location. Other than at set time points riders would need to call in advance to request pick up	Would serve commuters, travelers going to Vancouver or Portland and Hood River as well as those traveling within the county including after school students and seniors	For completely new service, would cost about \$110,000 a year to provide this service. Could be provided as a modification of existing dial-a-ride service. Also would need mini-bus and backup vehicle costing about \$75,000, could purchase through long term lease	Awarded rural mobility funding. Senior Services; Jobs access funding.
Community Vanpool Service: a central sponsoring agency providing insured, maintained and accessible vehicles to local town councils or community associations in exchange for their agreement to operate the vehicles, pay for gas and oil, and recruit and supervise volunteer drivers.	Group trips or other needs identified by community.	Vehicles, gas, insurance, sponsoring agency and volunteer drivers, Yearly cost depends on number of miles traveled. Less than \$5,000	United Way, private foundations, corporate sponsorship
Ridesharing: program to assist commuters find partners to share rides to Clark County and	Commuters	Website management and set up; marketing of program to get	CarpoolMatchNW; Website and RTC support

other locations		critical mass of users. Quarter-time person to market: Yearly cost \$10,000; could also support vanpool program	
Vanpool: riders going to a closely located work sites in Clark County or other locations could share a vanpool. Requires 30 day payment in advance and long-term commitment	Commuters going to Clark County/Portland area on a daily basis for the work day	Sponsoring agency/person to lease the vehicle. Riders pay cost of vehicle	C-Tran will pay 25% of cost for service into Clark County ; Website
School pool: school pools are targeted school carpooling programs for parents and youth.	Students staying after school or attending other after school activity	Need school admin time to distribute, collect and organize; No yearly cost	Website; coordination with schools
Intercity Service: this service could connect from The Dalles to Hood River While Salmon, Stevenson into the Greater Portland area. It would run once or twice a day at times that are convenient for users to go into the greater Portland area and return in the same day	All travelers although it might not be convenient for commuters. People could access airport and Amtrak	Assuming two round trips a day at 3 hours one way, 12 hours of service at \$35 an hour five days a week would cost about \$110,000 a year. This does not take into account cost of crossing bridge. Would need coordination between Oregon and Washington	Gorge coordinating committee.

Zone or Flex Routing

This study strongly recommends that the county use its Rural Mobility Funding from the state to implement this type of service. It will successfully meet several of the transportation needs of the county.

A zone or flex route is a hybrid of a fixed route and a demand response one. While the service will pick a rider up at his or her house, it has a schedule that it travels, so the customer must adjust the ride time to meet that schedule. For example, if the bus is in the Carson area traveling toward Stevenson at 1PM to 1:15 and a rider would like to be

picked up in Carson to go to Stevenson at 12:30, that rider must adjust the time of the ride to when the bus will be in the area going in the right direction.

This service could meet the demands of people who need curb-to-curb and those who do not, as some specific time-point bus stops could be set up at convenient locations such as the senior center or the library.

This service could make several trips a day starting from Carson/Stevenson in the morning traveling into Clark County and then back to Stevenson stopping along the way where needed. It could then travel on to White Salmon to connect with MATS service into Hood River and then back to Stevenson and on to Clark County. Its most logical stopping point here would be the Fisher's Landing Park and Ride that provides C-Tran service to both Portland and Vancouver. It would deviate several miles from SR 14, but would not be able to serve everyone, as it would have a schedule to adhere to. It would run for 12 hours a day for five days a week. It could make three trips a day into Clark County and two into White Salmon. The service would cost about \$110,000 if vehicles were provided. Without vehicles it would cost more. Senior Services could go out to bid for the service and contract with a provider. This is a conceptual service plan and will need to be modified based on:

- Timed distanced between communities and zones to set up zone schedule.
- MATS service schedule.
- Service zone boundaries.
- Potential timed stops.

Figure 10 presents the pros and cons of this type of service.

Figure 10
Pros and Cons of Zone or Flex Routing

Pros	Cons
Shift some riders from higher cost door to door to lower cost fixed route	May require acquisition of larger vehicle
Service is demand responsive, not time responsive	May require drivers become certified with Commercial Driver License (CDL)
Service will provide key service need within County	Less personalized service
Practical solution scaled to time and resources	
Provides connectivity to region	
Flexible rural service	
Responds to employment transportation needs	
Non-purpose based transportation option	
Potential JARC funds available	
Scheduled route	
Requires only 2 hr. notification rather than a day	
Broadens base of Senior Services service	
Highlights existing service population	

Volunteer Program

Currently, Skamania Senior Services and Catholic Community Services rely on fewer than 10 volunteers to provide transportation services to Skamania residents. Senior Services has four regular and four part-time volunteer drivers to supplement its paratransit operations, while CCS relies exclusively on three volunteers to provide all medical and senior trips in the county. Some of these volunteers drive for both agencies. Currently, all volunteers drive their own cars as opposed to agency vehicles.

Given the county's population, it could be possible to recruit and train a considerably larger network of volunteer drivers to support local and inter-county transportation services. One approach to expanding the volunteer base would be to implement a community van program as described below. Another would be a comprehensive campaign, involving county and municipal agencies, school districts, community and social service agencies, churches and other consumer and voluntary health groups, such as the American Cancer Society and National Kidney Foundation, to develop a coordinated network of volunteer drivers. Some volunteers would drive their own cars but would not require any reimbursement. Others could drive agency or community vehicles. And still other community members might be willing to drive if they were reimbursed for mileage or received other financial incentives. Major volunteer transportation agencies are nearby – Ride Connection in Portland, People to People in Yakima, WA and COAST in Colfax, WA – and could provide helpful technical assistance and support to a major volunteer initiative in Skamania Co. In fact, Ride Connection in Portland has volunteered to help train drivers.

A centralized broker of volunteer transport would be needed to coordinate the services; maintain a community website to recruit drivers and escorts, match riders and drivers, post scheduled trip, etc.; operate a centralized call center to schedule rides and dispatch volunteers; and to reimburse drivers.

A major stumbling block to setting up such a program or any of the proposed strategies listed here is the lack of staff at Senior Services to coordinate such a program. However, with the award of the rural mobility grant, the county and Senior Services will have funding for a part time transportation coordinator who could take on these responsibilities. Senior Services could advertise for this position or could seek the assistance of a volunteer or intern from AmeriCorps or the Jesuit Volunteer Program. These interns work full time for a year for about \$11,000. The program that assigns them also helps oversee them to ensure they are fulfilling their obligations.

Community Vanpool

To help meet mobility needs of small and isolated rural communities that do not have access to public transit service, community van programs offer a partial solution. The basics of the program involve a central sponsoring agency – perhaps Skamania County

-- providing insured, maintained and accessible vehicles to local community councils in exchange for their agreement to operate the vehicles, pay for gas and oil, and recruit and supervise volunteer drivers.

Skamania County Senior Services or the county would form a partnership with individual community councils-perhaps in Mill A or Underwood-to operate the transportation system. Each participating council then designates an all volunteer operating board of directors to actually plan for and operate the community van program.

The **sponsoring agency** (Skamania County) purchases the vehicles; pays for the licenses plates, all maintenance, repairs and insurance costs, staff salaries of those who supervise the program and other related costs; provides technical assistance to its program partners; and trains and certifies all volunteer drivers. The **community councils** are responsible for establishing volunteer boards to operate the CVP; determine how the volunteer boards are to report to the councils about activity; and allow the volunteer boards to establish savings accounts for funds generated from donations and local fundraisers to help pay for new replacement vehicles. The **participating communities** have total responsibility for the operation of the program. They recruit volunteer drivers and board members, identify local transportation needs within their service boundaries, schedule trips, pay for all gas and oil, collect donations from riders, raise funds to help pay matching costs for new vehicles, and assist with marketing and public education.

Possible funding sources include Sections 5310 and 5311, Rural Mobility Grants, Community Development Block Grants, United Way, private foundation grants, and corporate sponsorship.

This service provides some distinct advantages; it is low cost, incremental (can be expanded as resources/vehicles become available), decentralized and responsive to local needs and priorities, and has potential for mobilizing community leadership and volunteer resources.

On the other hand it requires funding resources to purchase/lease and maintain vehicles, staff to coordinate, and it is time consuming due to reliance on volunteers. It needs an active community willing to take such a project on. Also, it's not a panacea, and should be operated in conjunction with other community transit.

Ridesharing

A rideshare program connects people who live near each other and are commuting to a close location at a similar time. Ridesharing usually focuses a work trip at the employment end, but it could be used to hook up commuters into Portland or the Vancouver area. There must be a critical mass of people coming from the same area for people to find traveling partners. However, since most everybody commuting into Portland or Vancouver uses SR 14, the critical mass from Skamania County does not

have to be as great as it would need to be for areas that had several major travel routes.

The city of Portland has established a website, CarpoolNW, to match riders. Commuters can now use that website, however for it to have much success in Skamania, this program would need at least a part time staff person to market the program within the county. This marketing program could be supported by information on the currently underdevelopment Gorge Transportation Website or on the Skamania County website. Additionally, Skamania County could contract with the CarpoolNW program to get monthly reports and provide customer assistance. The cost of this service is about \$5,000 for a year.

Vanpool

In a vanpool program, commuters (most often) going to a closely located work locations share a leased vehicle. One of the vanpoolers takes the responsibility of driving. In exchange the driver rides for free and may get to take the van home on weekends and use it for a set number of miles for free. Private for profit companies such as VPSI lease the vehicles at a set rate based on the size of the van and the number of miles it travels. VPSI states that the average cost per rider is about \$0.05 a mile. This cost includes insurance, and maintenance. The cost is covered by the riders who split the expense. This program requires a 30-day payment in advance and a long-term commitment. If riders drop out, then the others must pick up the cost of that rider's share.

Commuters to Clark County from Skamania could leave the vehicle in a C-Tran park and ride or take it to a more specific location, depending on the destinations of the riders. Currently, C-Tran will pay 25 percent of the monthly rental cost and will provide gas coupons. It does not lease the vehicles, however. Most of its pools are leased by employers, but another sponsoring agency/person could lease the vehicle.

Again for this type of program to be a success, it would need a staff person to market the program in Skamania County. This marketing program could be supported by information on the currently under development Gorge Transportation Website.

School Pool

School pools are a targeted school carpooling program for parents and youth. The program can be set up using a simple ride matching technique of mapping addresses with pins and a map or a more sophisticated system of using a city's, county's or transit district's rideshare matching program.

To set up a school pool, parents fill out a match list request form and send it to the designated coordinating school or agency. Confidentiality concerns are addressed by distributing only the names, street names (no addresses), cross streets, and phone numbers to other participating families. Compiled information, called match lists, are sent to other participating parents of the designated school. Match lists are only available to parents registered in the school pool program.

School Pool programs would be the responsibility of the school district, however the county or the Gorge Transportation Committee could advertise the programs on their websites. The appendix discusses an existing school pool program in California.

Intercity Service

This service could connect The Dalles to Hood River While Salmon, Stevenson into the Greater Portland area. It would run once or twice a day at times that are convenient for users to go into the Greater Portland area and return in the same day. This service would have to be a coordinated effort of the Gorge Transportation Committee including transportation providers on both sides of the river.

Until recently, the Washington Department of Transportation provided over \$100,000 a year of Federal Transit Administration funds to Greyhound to provide this service. Unfortunately its schedule limited its usefulness and its use and the company has eliminated this service. Assuming two round trips a day at 3 hours one way, 12 hours of service at \$35 an hour five days a week would cost about \$110,000 a year. If interested, the Gorge group could apply for intercity funds from both Oregon and Washington.

Organizational Structure

Currently, Skamania County provides transportation services through Skamania Senior Services. However, the director of senior services is the transportation director as well. Her job description dedicates less than 10 percent of her time for transportation services. To successfully undertake any of these programs, the county will need to dedicate more staff time.

There are two approaches to providing expanded transportation services:

- Establishing a Public Transportation Benefits Area (PTBA) with a tax base.
- Expanding staff dedicated to transportation services.

The State of Washington allows local areas to set up authorities with taxing power to provide local public transportation. The most typical way to do this is a Public Transportation Benefit Area (PTBA). A PTBA can be county wide, less than county wide, or multi-county. Only one PTBA can exist in each county. To set one up, county commissioners convene a public transportation conference to decide if there is sufficient interest to form a PTBA. The conference is followed by formal establishment of boundaries and the selection of a board of directors. The board of directors is made up of elected officials representing the communities inside the PTBA boundaries and the county(s). The PTBA has taxing power with the approval of the voters. It can use the following taxing tools:

- Sales Tax (0.1% to 0.9%)-this is the most frequently used
- Household Tax (up to \$1 per month)
- Business and Occupations Tax
- Utilities Tax

A sales tax of 3/10th of one percent in Skamania County would raise about \$150,000 in revenue annually, enough to support the zone routing service. But, while 74 percent of those surveyed for this study said they would support a tax of 3/10ths of one percent for services for the transportation disadvantaged and 64 percent would support such a tax for services for the general public, people are significantly more likely to say they will support a new tax than actually vote for it. Moreover, they may not vote in favor of it in a time when the county has to cut services and expenses by 17 percent. Therefore, while the establishment of a benefits area may be a good idea in the future this is not the appropriate time.

The other organizational option is to continue to provide transportation services through the Senior Services program that is currently doing such a good job with limited resources. However, this program will need a staff person to manage expanded programs. With tight funds there are a few ways to do this.

- Use recently awarded rural mobility funds for a part time staff person. The application identifies this as part of the funded program.
- Seek a volunteer
- Hire an AmeriCorps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps person. These-for the most part-young people will work full time for one year for about \$11,000 or \$12,000. We recommend exploring this option.

In addition we recommend the organization of a transportation advisory committee that will report to the director of Senior Services. This group would meet quarterly to assess options for transportation services and to perform outreach in the community.

Funding Opportunities

For Skamania County to develop these programs it must seek new funding opportunities. The County has just learned that it will receive rural mobility funding for one year in the amount of \$193,000. If the service is successful, it can be funded for following years. This plan recommends that these funds be used to provide the zone routing service and to hire a staff person to manage the transportation program.

Other future potential funding sources include:

- FTA 5311 (f) for intercity transit to connect Skamania County with the national transportation system. In coordination with the Gorge group Skamania County could seek funds from both Washington and Oregon or it could seek funds by itself for its zone routing connection to Clark County.
- Jobs Access Reverse Commute Funds (JARC) This program funds projects to develop transportation services designed to transport welfare recipients and low-income individuals to and from jobs. Eligible projects include capital and operating costs of equipment, facilities and associated capital maintenance items, promoting transit use by workers with nontraditional work schedules and other employer provided benefits. Grants require a 50 percent match, although unlike other federal funds, it can be matched with other federal dollars. Senior

services considered seeking this funding several years ago but was unable to meet the needs of these low income clients while continuing to serve its primary constituency. Now with the potential to implement a zone routing system that can serve both groups, it should be able to pursue this funding to continue to support zone routing. This program is intended to provide funds for projects that will become self-funding and is not intended for on-going support.

Proposed Plan of Action

The following figure recommends specific actions and a time line for implementing them.

Figure 11
Recommended Plan of Action

Action	Timeline
Develop schedule and plan for zone routing	Within two months of receipt of state grant
Hire transportation coordinator	Within three months of receipt of grant
Go out to bid for contractor (if service will be bid out)	Within three months of receipt of grant
Start zone routing service	Within 5 months of receipt of grant funds
Develop and begin volunteer program	Within 6 months of receipt of grant
Develop and begin vanpool and rideshare program	Within 6 months
Organize transportation advisory committee	This summer
Seek funding for additional years of service	Within 12 months
Assess possibility of establishing PTBA	Annually